



About Hurricanes

Hurricanes are powerful storms that form at sea with wind speeds of 74 mph or greater. Hurricanes are tracked by satellites from the moment they begin to form, so there is usually a warning 3-4 days before a storm strikes. A hurricane covers a circular area between 200 and 480 miles in diameter. In the storm, strong winds and rain surround a central, calm "eye," which is about 15 miles across. Winds in a hurricane can sometimes reach 200 miles per hour. However, the greatest damage to life and property is not from the wind, but from tidal surges and flash flooding.

Because of the destructive power of a hurricane, you should never ignore an evacuation order. Many victims of Hurricane Andrew who did ignore evacuation orders lost their lives or found that they could do nothing to protect their property against the storm.

Hurricane Disasters

As population growth continues along vulnerable coastal areas in the United States, more and more people face the potential hazards that result from a hurricane. Today, approximately 75 million people live within 50 miles of potential hurricane zones.

Some climatologists are concerned that hurricane activity affecting the coastal areas of the United States may increase because of the climatic changes now occurring in Western Africa. Similar climatic changes occurred from 1940 to 1950. During that period, there were three direct hurricane strikes in the greater Miami metropolitan area, one in the Tampa region, one near New Orleans, and one on the Gulf coast of Texas.

The greatest natural disaster in history occurred on September 8, 1900, when a hurricane struck Galveston, Texas, killing more 6,000 people. Fortunately, as hurricane forecasting, emergency response plans, evacuation procedures, and the training of public health workers have improved in this century, the loss of human life has been greatly reduced. In 1992, while Hurricane Andrew caused an estimated \$20 billion in property damage in Florida and Louisiana, the human toll was 41 people. While each life lost is one too many, the only way to reduce the human cost of a hurricane is with adequate preparation.

For more information, visit www.bt.cdc.gov, or call the CDC public response hotline at (888) 246-2675 (English), (888) 246-2857 (español), or (866) 874-2646 (TTY).

June 30, 2004

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